

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 AID-05 /057 W
-----099011 071754Z /43

O 071721Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8383

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 5344

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CO
SUBJ: CONSERVATIVES WILL CONTEST TURBAY'S APPARENT VICTORY

REF: BOGOTA 5298

1. SUMMARY. THE POST ELECTORAL ATMOSPHERE IS CALM BUT UNCERTAIN, AS CONSERVATIVES SEEM DETERMINED TO CHALLENGE BEFORE THE ELECTORAL COURT THE APPARENT AND SLENDER VICTORY OF LIBERAL CANDIDATE TURBAY IN THE JUNE 4 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. IT IS NOT CLEAR HOW LONG THIS PROCESS MIGHT TAKE. ALTHOUGH THE FINAL VERDICT WILL PROBABLY BE FOR TURBAY, IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANT VOTING FRAUD IN HIS FAVOR COULD PRODUCE A RESULT IN FAVOR OF BETANCUR. END SUMMARY.

2. THE POST ELECTORAL SITUATION ALTHOUGH CALM REMAINS SOMEWHAT UNCERTAIN AND CONFUSED, FOLLOWING LIBERAL TURBAY'S VERY NARROW APPARENT VICTORY OVER CONSERVATIVE BETANCUR IN THE JUNE 4 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. BETANCUR HAS YET TO CONCEDE DEFEAT AND IT DOES NOT SEEM LIKELY NOW THAT HE WILL DO SO UNTIL THE ELECTORAL COURT ANNOUNCES THE OFFICIAL WINNER. IT IS NOT CLEAR HOW LONG THIS WILL TAKE, SINCE IT MAY INVOLVE THE INVESTIGATION OF CASES OF ALLEGED ELECTORAL FRAUD AND POSSIBLY A RECOUNT OF THE VOTES OF SEVERAL CONTESTED DISTRICTS.

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3. AS OF JUNE 6 IT APPEARED THAT MOST CONSERVATIVES, IN PARTICULAR THE PARTY'S MAJORITY WING LED BY ALVARO GOMEZ, WERE MOVING TOWARD ACCEPTANCE OF A TURBAY VICTORY AT THE POLLS. EDITORIALS IN GOMEZ' EL SIGLO HAD BECOME MORE CONCILIATORY AND ALVARISTA CONSERVATIVES HAD EXPRESSED TO EMBASSY OFFICERS THEIR RESIGNATION TO BETANCUR'S DEFEAT. THEY WERE ASSISTED IN THIS BY A PROPITIATORY STATEMENT BY TURBAY ON JUNE 5 WHICH MADE EXPLICIT REFERENCE

TO THE "POLITICAL FACT" THAT THE CONSERVATIVES HAD OBTAINED "A NUMBER OF VOTES VERY CLOSE TO THAT WHICH ELECTED HIM." TURBAY COMMITTED HIMSELF TO A "BROAD AND FLEXIBLE" APPLICATION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENT THAT THE RUNNER-UP PARTY RECEIVE "ADEQUATE AND EQUITABLE" REPRESENTATION IN THE GOVERNMENT (THIS REQUIREMENT GOES INTO EFFECT WITH THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEXT GOVERNMENT ON AUGUST 7, 1978). HE ALSO PROMISED TO CARRY OUT HIS PROGRAMS IN "CONSULTATION AND AGREEMENT" WITH THE CONSERVATIVES AND TO INITIATE TALKS WITH CONSERVATIVE LEADERS "AS SOON AS POSSIBLE." TURBAY POINTED OUT THAT THIS APPROACH IS FULLY IN KEEPING WITH HIS "MODERATE TEMPERAMENT" AND HIS "WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE."

4. GOMEZ AND HIS FELLOW MODERATES, HOWEVER, HAVE BEEN CRITICIZED FOR THEIR "GIVEAWAY" POSITION BY IMPORTANT MEMBERS OF HIS OWN WING OF THE PARTY, AS WELL AS BY THE PASTRANA FACTION AND THOSE ELEMENTS OF THE ANAPO WHICH SUPPORTED BETANCUR. THESE LATTER CLAIM TO KNOW OF INSTANCES OF FRAUD OR SIMPLE ERROR WHICH WHEN CORRECTED COULD ALTER THE ELECTORAL VERDICT IN FAVOR OF BETANCUR. MEANWHILE, NATIONAL REGISTRAR AYERBE CHAUX REMINDED THE NATION ON JUNE 6 THAT ONLY THE ELECTORAL COURT COULD PROCLAIM THE OFFICIAL WINNER.

5. THE LATEST OFFICIAL RESULTS HAVE TURBAY LEADING BY AROUND 86,000 VOTES, WITH SOME 3 PERCENT OF THE TOWNSHIPS STILL TO BE REPORTED. THUS, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT TURBAY'S LEAD COULD SLIP EVEN FURTHER. ALL SIDES ARE REMAINING CALM, HOWEVER, PENDING A CONFIDENTIAL

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DECISION BY THE ELECTORAL COURT, THE TIMING OF WHICH NO ONE CAN PREDICT. ANOTHER UNCERTAINTY IS HOW THE EVENTUAL LOSERS WILL ACCEPT THE COURT'S VERDICT WHEN IT IS FINALLY RENDERED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION RESULTS, PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, ALLEGATIONS, ELECTION FRAUD
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BOGOTA05344
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780238-0249
Format: TEL
From: BOGOTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780688/aaaacxlt.tel
Line Count: 98
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: fe4c5e90-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 BOGOTA 5298
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2461250
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONSERVATIVES WILL CONTEST TURBAY'S APPARENT VICTORY
TAGS: PINT, CO, (BETANCUR, BELISARIO), (TURBAY AYALA, JULIO CESAR)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbsc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/fe4c5e90-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014